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ABSTRACT

To examine press freedom in the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) and the role the ROK's press plays as the advantages of democracy and authoritarianism are being publicly debated, this paper looks back at where the ROK has been in terms of its social and political freedoms and where it is going in its attempts to break from its authoritarian past. The paper (1) traces the development of Korean newspapers; (2) determines the role of the Korean press in the early days of the republic; (3) assesses the policies, towards the press, of Park Chung Hee, who ruled the ROK from the time of his military coup in 1961 to his assassination in 1979, and those who followed him; and (4) analyzes the new liberalization that began with the return of Kim Dae Jung, an opposition leader, and the fall of President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines. The paper concludes that the freedom of the press and democratic aspirations may be suppressed at any time due to all-encompassing laws that can be used legally to implement such a crackdown and that a number of forces, such as ROK's military, United States policy, and the Korean public, will all play a role in determining the ROK's future. (Sixty-nine references are appended.) (MS)

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PRESS FREEDOM IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA:

COPING WITH THE AUTHORITARIAN STRUCTURE

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BY

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PRESS FREEDOM IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA:

COPING WITH THE AUTHORITARIAN STRUCTURE

The authoritarian concept of the press has become a sad cliche for describing some governments' methods of press control. The methods include pre-publication censorship, forced closings of newspapers and television stations, and torture and intimidation of journalists.[1] The Republic of Korea (ROK) is one of several newly industrializing countries (NIC's) in the Far East where the "trappings of democracy" belie a "centralized authoritarian structure" (Harrison, 1987, p. 158). This structure is supported by the police, the courts, the military and -- most important of all -- a contrived electoral system that, until this system was finally abolished in the summer of 1987, kept the ruling party in power. The ROK held its first direct presidential election since 1971 in December 1987. Therefore, at this time, it is worth looking back at where the ROK has been in terms of its social and political freedoms and where it is going in its attempts to break from its authoritarian past.

Kyu Ho Youm (1986a, 1986b), in extensive reviews of the ROK's press laws, contended that there are few direct legal restrictions against the press. Rather, laws indirectly pertaining to the press (e.g., security laws, defamation laws, obscenity laws, privacy laws, and so forth) constitute the methods of control. As with most constitutions, the ROK's grants press freedom. However, the same article granting that freedom discusses individual and social rights which override press freedom. This paper will examine press freedom in the ROK and the role of the ROK's press during this crucial period when the advantages of democracy and authoritarianism are being publicly debated. Although the ROK is a relatively young nation (founded in 1948), Korea is an ancient society. To

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understand press freedom in the ROK it is necessary to examine Korea's Confucian tradition, its subjugation under the Japanese, and the Korean War.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEWSPAPERS

It has frequently been observed that Korea's Confucian doctrine, the official political and social philosophy of Korea's last dynasty (the Yi Dynasty, 1392-1910), promotes the present situation of strongman rule, both in the ROK and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) (Han U-gun, 1976-1977; Wang, 1946; Smith, 1987). Confucianism views the government as an extended family. The ruler's relationship with the people is a familial one, with a powerful but benevolent, paternalistic leader to guide the people. The notions of codified law and contractual arrangements between the people and ruler are foreign concepts, just as there would be no contracts in a family. Above all, Confucianism values harmony and unity in the governmental-family system. Unfortunately, democracy rarely involves harmony or unity.

According to Choe Chung-ho (1982), a journalism scholar at Yonsei University, Korea has a long history of press freedom, which he compared to the "libertarian" concept of the press (see Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). Even in the 16th century, public criticism of the king could be legally communicated without fear of retribution through public letters. Choe conceded, however, that in accordance with Confucian tradition only the literati could take advantage of this freedom. Nevertheless, Choe maintained that this system served to check royal authority.

Though Choe contended that Korea has a long press tradition, nothing resembling a modern-day newspaper emerged in Korea until the late 19th century. Korea developed movable type two centuries before Guttenberg, but

the notion of using this invention to reach the public was never considered (Kim Bong-gi, 1965; Oh & Won, 1976). Newsletters, such as the Royal Court Report, were only available to the literati (Lent, 1974, p. 126). Korea's popular news media are Westen developments introduced into the country through Western missionaries and the Japanese, who learned of newspapers through Westerners. The Japanese introduced the first newspaper into Korea on December 1881, the Chosen Shinpo (Altman, 1984). The first newspaper expressing a uniquely Korean view, Hansong Sunbo, was published by the government's newly created Office of Culture and Information in 1883 (Lee, 1986). Not until 1896 was a Korean newspaper, Tongnip Sinmun, published by private individuals who critically reported on Korean affairs (Kim Bong-gi, 1971, pp. 88-89). Also in 1896, Syngman Rhee, who was later to become the ROK's first president, published Korea's first daily newspaper, Maiyil-Shinmun (Rowland, 1958).

The most important aspect of the development of the Korean press is that it established its popular reputation among the public during the early 20th century under Japanese subjugation. The press led the clarion call for independence and nationalism, and established a reputation for honesty and forthrightness. Had the Korean press not developed during this period, given its traditional reputation as an outlet for the nation's elite, its possible that its influence upon the ROK during later years might have been quite different. Japanese subjugation of the Korean peninsula began after the signing of the Portsmouth Treaty between Japan and Russia in 1905, and formal annexation of Korea in 1910, which did not end until Japan's defeat in the Second World War. Stories of the Korean press' role in defying Japanese rule are legion (Kim Bong-gi, 1965; Hahn Hueng-soo, 1975; Kim & Oh, 1974, p. 77; Lee, 1984; Oh & Won, 1976). As

press scholar John C. Merrill (1959, p. 260) wrote of the Korean press during Japanese subjugation: "It might be said that the early Korean press in its revolutionary tendencies could be compared to the American press of the 18th century."

In 1905, the Taehan Maeil Sinbo placed a sign over its office declaring "No Entry to Japanese" and detailed acts of Japanese aggression (Lee, 1984, pp. 329-331; Chong Chin-sok, 1980, pp. 59-114). Since the paper was controlled by an Englishman, and Japan and England were allies, the paper was able to defy Japanese censorship. The Japanese complained to the British consular. As a result, the editor-publisher of the Maeil Sinbo was forced to sever his connections with the newspaper (Chong Chin-Sok, 1984, pp. 39-44). Another well-known incident occurred when Son Gi-jong, a Korean, won a marathon during the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. A photograph of Son on the podium with the Japanese flag on his uniform was air-transported by the Japanese for use in the Dong-A Ilbo. The Dong-A published the photograph with the flag air-brushed out. Sixteen Dong-A staffers were subsequently jailed for 40 days. These and other defiant acts by the Korean press reportedly led Ito Hirobumi, the first Japanese resident general of Korea, to remark that a single word in a Korean newspaper carried more power than a hundred of his own words (Lee, 1984, pp. 330-331). On the eve of the Pacific War, Japan eliminated all newspapers in Korea, with the exception of the Japanese government organ.

THE EARLY DAYS OF THE REPUBLIC

The Korean press' role under Japanese rule led many American press scholars to suggest that the press of the newly established Republic would enjoy considerable freedom (Ellard, 1957; Oliver, 1957; Rowland, 1958). South Koreans, afterall, fought with the help of United Nations' forces

against communism and won its right of independence. Ellard (1957) wrote that "Korea -- in my opinion at least -- is the only country in the Orient not only ready for democracy but wanting it. Korea is the best ideological beachhead in the Far East for Occidental concepts of the closest approach to liberty in the world" (p. 59). Ellard and other American press scholars were aware of President Rhee's authoritarian actions. Ellard criticized attacks by Rhee's "goons" on the Dong-A Ilbo's offices after it criticized Rhee's policy of requiring young girls to march through the streets chanting "Down with Communists!" The newspaper, Ellard wrote, felt that young girls should stay home and study. Nevertheless, Ellard and other scholars argued that such incidents were merely the growing pains of a developing nation.

After Rhee closed down the prestigious Dong-A Ilbo for 30 days for criticizing Rhee's policies, Rowland (1958), like other scholars, viewed this incident as an anomaly: "The government seems to have learned to accept and profit by criticism from the press, while the press has become a more mature critic" (p. 452). Rowland also pointed to the lack of newsprint and other resources requiring and even justifying, in his opinion, the registration (licensing) of newspapers. This was indeed an odd stance for an American press scholar to take. It illustrates how some of the early scholars were so fearful of communism that they were willing to tolerate a totalitarian regime and even rationalize its excesses.[2] Rowland wrote that Rhee "is embarressed by the necessity for restricting the number of newspapers" (p. 452, emphasis added). Oliver (1957) echoed American scholars' hopes for the First Republic: "'Free' is an entirely accurate term for South Korean newspapers -- although 'unrestrained' might be better . . . . As time goes on and experience is gained, Korean

newspapers may improve greatly in maturity and accuracy. But they can never be more free than they are today" (pp. 85-86).

These accolades for a dictatorial regime seemed absurd to Sunwoo Nam (1970), a former staff member of the Dong-A Ilbo turned scholar. Nam attacked Oliver as a Rhee "apologist" (p. 16). In all fairness to these scholars, the nation was devastated by the war and poverty. Many of the nation's laws were still based on the laws implemented by the United States during the post-war occupation. From a purely legal viewpoint, the press was free. And indeed, the Korean press freely disseminated a variety of views. In fact, many American scholars, such as Ellard, were disturbed by this "political press" and hoped to see an "objective" press develop[3]:

> Many "opposition papers" exist. That leads persons in Korea and out of it to conclude that Korea has a "free press." Yet the opposition is always in the form of an opinion, quite unsupported by fact. . . . Therein lies a subtle thwarting of communication freedom in Korea -- duplicated in other parts of the world. . . . Korean newspapers, without exception -- opposition and government-owned alike -- are daily political pamphlets whose editors write political opinions to each other (p. 59, original emphasis).

The U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) after World War II sought, without success, to impose a Western press model in Korea. In 1945, 68 newspapers, many of them communist newspapers, were published. In 1946, in the face of increasing social unrest, the USAMGIK promulgated Ordinance No. 88, which provided for the registration (i.e., licensing) of newspapers. Even after the Republic was formed in 1948 and the American military government was dismantled and most communists went to the DPRK, Rhee continued the promulgation of Ordinance 88. The ordinance wasn't abolished until Rhee was forced to resign under the pressure of student uprisings in April 1960 (Korea Annual, 1985, pp. 196-197).

PARK'S LEGACY: MODERNIZATION AT ANY COST

Park Chung Hee, who ruled the ROK from the time of his military coup in 1961 to his assassination in 1979, made a lasting impression on the ROK. Park's impact can be attributed not only to the duration of his rule, but also to his relentless drive to modernize the ROK at any cost. He would let nothing get in the way of his grandiose plans for modernization, including civil liberties or a critical press.

President Syngman Rhee's downfall was widely interpreted as a triumph for democracy. Rhee was elected the nation's first president in an election held in the Southern sector in 1948 before the formal division of the peninsula. The North refused to participate in the election. At the time, Rhee was regarded as the nation's leading statesman. He stayed in power until 1960, gaining a reputation for dictatorial rule during the Korean War (1950-53) and its aftermath. He defeated Cho Bong-am in 1956. Cho, nonetheless, emerged as a popular leader who posed a challenge to Rhee's rule. In 1959, Cho was convicted of being a North Korean agent in what is widely regarded as trumped-up charges and hanged. Rhee won re-election for the final time in 1960 when his opponent, Chough Byong-ok, died of illness during the campaign. Widespread voter fraud led to student demonstrations. Rhee's running mate, Lee Ki-poong, died in a dramatic family suicide pact when police shot and killed 200 demonstrators outside the presidential mansion. Rhee was forced to step down after the bloodbath and found sanctuary in Hawaii (Minn, 1987).

Rhee's downfall enhanced the credibility of the university students and the press. The university students earned the reputation of the "conscience of the country." Since the press also contributed to Rhee's fall from power, the press' prestige, which was already considerable

because of its defiance of Japanese subjugation during pre-War Japanese occupation, was further enhanced. Yun Po-sun was elected largely as a figurehead president to succeed Rhee. A parliamentary system was established under the leadership of Premier Myun Chang. Under Chang's brief rule, Koreans enjoyed new-found freedoms. Almost anyone could start a newspaper. The number of newspapers increased from 41 to 131; the number of news agencies increased from 14 to 276 (Nam, 1978a, p. 109). With the sudden emergence of press freedom after years of restriction, many individuals took advantage of the situation to call themselves "publishers" who were in effect extortionists who sought bribes to withhold publishing embarrassing information:

> It was said that one could become a "publisher" of a newspaper for only 2000 won (about $1.50 United States), 1000 won to register with the authorities, another 1000 to have personal name cards printed. On the strength of such identification papers and name cards, all self-furnished, so-called "publishers" showed up at the Ministry of Transportation and demanded first class train tickets as a token of respect due a "publisher." Or, in the Ministry of Communications, free installations of telephones were demanded (Lent, 1974, p. 118).

Many of the newly established newspapers never had time to publish a single issue before the May 16, 1961, coup led by Gen. Park. Park believed the limits of freedom were taken too far, especially when demonstrators at a mass rally in Seoul two days before the coup called upon the government to meet with DPRK leaders at Panmunjom. The press reported all sides of this debate. Under the military junta's crackdown, 960 reporters were purged. The initial crackdown on the press enjoyed wide public and even press support because of the bad reputations earned by "fake" journalists. The number of newspapers fell to 34 and the number of agencies to six. Martial law was repeatedly invoked during the 1960's. Outright censorship was imposed and reporters were jailed through the enforcement of vaguely

worded "anti-communist" laws which made it a crime to even report "anti-state" rallies (Nam, 1978a, p. 44).

Park knew that he could not rule indefinitely by force alone. He implemented popular programs for economic reform, including a much publicized Saemaul Undong (New Community Movement) rural reform program that enabled urban amenities to be available in rural areas. The movement was as popular as President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program was in the United States. Saemul also shared many similarities with the Great Society. Park also initiated the nation's export-oriented economy. In this regard, Park's economic policies were in sharp contrast to Rhee's protectionist policies. Park's economic successes brought tangible improvements that made him popular among the public (Han, 1974). The junta drew up a new Constitution in December 1962, permitting direct presidential elections and a free press. In August 1963, Park was elected president with an electoral plurality of 47 percent over Yun Po-sun.

In a speech before newspapermen in April 1966, Park warned journalists to tread carefully in attacks against the government. He urged journalists to work with the government to achieve modernization:

> Now is the time for the press to refine this reckless attitude and, through reflection, develop a constructive attitude with which to meet the demands of the new age and the new situation. Now the nation is situated in a grave period, which requires us to unite ourselves, to help encourage and support each other, so that we can achieve the two greatest national tasks of modernization and reunification (quoted in Shin Bum Shik, 1970, pp. 99-100).

Choe Chung-ho (1982) described Park as one of the early advocates of "developmental journalism," long before the this concept was clearly conceptualized.[4] Park envisioned the ROK as a model for Third World development, and journalism would play no small part in Park's plans:

> When modernization was apotheosized as the impending national objective, every possible means mobilized for it tended to be justified. The efficiency of mass media was evaluated highly as instrumental for development, and a new role had to be imposed on Korean journalism in the decades of modernization (Choe Chung-ho, 1982, p. 28).

To accomplish his goals, Park used the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) to conduct extra-legal activities. KCIA agents visited newsrooms and "chatted" with reporters about the day's news and even personally edited news reports (Nam, 1978b). Press censorship was so complete that when the ROK and Japan were involved in a major international dispute after KCIA agents kidnapped opposition leader Kim Dae Jung from a Tokyo hotel room in 1973, the Korean press did not report the kidnapping. Similarly, during the "Koreagate" scandal in 1976, when KCIA agents bribed U.S. legislators and provided them with callgirls, the incident went unreported in the Korean press even though it made world headlines (Campbell, 1976).

Olsen (1980) compared Korea under Park to a profit-driven conglomerate which he labelled "Korea, Inc." To achieve modernization, Park had to make fundamental changes in Korean society. Under Confucian tradition, physical labor and commercial activities were scorned by an elite ruling class. Under Park, physical labor and business acumen were needed for the modernization of the country. By the mid-1960s "the leadership was under the tutelage of well-trained economists who were willing to sacrifice political liberty to attain stable, planned economic growth" (Olsen, 1980, p. 71). In his book Korea Reborn, Park (1979) emphasized the importance of planned economic growth. He made clear that his economic policies were politically motivated. The ROK, Park believed, was in "competition" with the DPRK:

> I have proposed to North Korea to accept peaceful competition between our free system and theirs to determine which system can give the people a better life. The Republic of Korea is already emerging victorious from this competition and by fully making use of our talent as a people, we should continue to sustain high growth to create in Korea an affluent, highly industrialized society (p. 91).

In order to legally run for president again, Park amended the constitution in 1969. All elections during Park's rule were suspicious, but the extent of election abuse during 1971 against his opponent Kim Dae Jung was excessive. As a result, Park's support dwindled in virtually all sectors of society. During late 1971 and early 1972, Park aggregated his power. In the face of Sino-U.S. normalization, Park proclaimed a national emergency and usurped extraordinary powers. Park argued that he needed these powers to deal with the DPRK from a position of strength (Anon., 1972, 1975; Kihl, 1973, 1984; Koh, 1974, 1984; Kwak Tae-Hwan, 1985). In October 1972, Park proclaimed martial law, dissolved the National Assembly, closed all universities, suspended political activities, and imposed strict press censorship. Within a few days Park put forward a new draft constitution, the Yushin (revitalization) Constitution, which eliminated direct presidential elections.

The Consitution provided for the president to be elected by a college of 2,359 delegates whose only function was to elect "without debate" a new president every six years. Critics contended that a powerful president could manipulate the congress. And indeed, Park was elected in 1972 by a vote of 2,357 to 2, with the two no votes declared invalid. In 1975 Park imposed an emergency measure that made it illegal to criticize the Constitution and, while public criticism of the Constitution was effectively muted, won support for his constitution during a 1975 referendum (Ledyard, 1977, p. 90). This system of the election of the president by a congress was reluctantly eliminated by the Chun government

in the summer of the 1987 after popular street protests demanding democratization.

The Yushin Constitution created a law-making body, a National Assembly, with one-third of the delegates -- a so-called "friendship association" -- appointed by the president. Article 18 of the Yushin Constitution provided for and restricted press freedom in the same breath. The word "except" in the Constitution's press clause was followed by the phrase ". . . as provided by law," and there were many such laws (Ledyard, 1977, p. 90). The National Assembly was granted the power to restrict what freedoms were granted; and the president reserved the right to suspend any freedoms granted under the Constitution and dissolve the National Assembly when he "deems it necessary."

As Park consolidated his power during the mid-1970's, defying him became increasingly dangerous. In October 1974, the prestigious Dong-A Ilbo defied government pressure and reported anti-government demonstrations and opposition demands. The Dong-A went so far as to post a sign over the newsroom demanding that KCIA agents stay out, reminiscent of the Korean press' defiance of Japanese censorship during the Japanese occupation of Korea. It would have been easy for the government to crack down on the Dong-A. But the Dong-A's prestige forced the government to restrain itself. Park had to satisfy clients in Washington and Tokyo (Hazelhurst, 1975). But defiance was spreading. Two other newspapers joined the Dong-A in reporting formerly taboo subjects.

The KCIA responded by secretly contacting the Dong-A's advertisers. Shortly afterwards, advertising in the Dong-A started to disappear. The Dong-A defiantly sought to resist the pressure. Supporters anonymously purchased small advertisements the size of greeting cards proclaiming their support for the Dong-A. The churches also came to the Dong-A's defense,

praising the Dong-A in the pulpits and asking church members to buy the Dong-A. By mid-1975, the Dong-A yielded and ceased reporting anti-government activities. Shortly afterwards, the Dong-A's advertisers returned. (Nam, 1978a, 1978b; Crabbe, 1975). Nam (1978b) described the Dong-A incident as Park's successful "taming" of the ROK's press:

> The press has been tamed. From time to time, for its own purposes, the government may allow newspapers to behave as if they were free. But the whip is there. After each brief government-approved show of liberty, the press can be counted on to return to its cage (p. 45).

AFTER PARK: THE SECOND TAMING

From 1975 on, the press did not dare to defy Park' authority. Not only was the press uncritical of Park, it was also co-opted as a state instrument. In line with government policy, the press was forced to report that anti-government demonstrations were "communist inspired" and matters dealing with opposition leader Kim Dae Jung were not reported at all (Chapman, 1980). Park was assassinated in October 1979 by the chief of the KCIA who believed that Park's abuses were excessive. It was possible to kill Park, but his authoritarian structure continued, particularly the firmly established military. Martial law still officially existed during this period of liberalization, and it was clear that the military could launch a coup at any time.

The post-Park era, under caretaker President Choi Kuy-ha, was marked by an uneasy liberalization. Choi promised a new constitution within a year, and all sides of constitutional reform were debated in the press. But there were limits. The late President Park and his Yushin Constitution could not be criticized. Kim Dae Jung was no longer a nonentity, but coverage of Kim was limited. He was identified without the title "Mr." before his name, a practice reserved for criminals (Nam, 1980). Kim could

appear in group photographs, but his solo photo was not permitted. His name could not be reported in headlines, and interviews with him were not permitted (Chapman, 1980). So much was still censored that American and Japanese tourists, referred to as the "rumor wire service," were often milked by Koreans for information about political events in the ROK (Nam, 1980, p. 262).

Gen. Chun Doo Hwan, who was close to Park, emerged as one of the leading generals after Park's death. Chun expanded martial law in May 1980, after the Kwangju uprising, ending the "liberalization" period. At first, the government denied there was an uprising at Kwangju, blaming the press for spreading "malicious, groundless rumors" (Pearce, 1980). After the government conceded that an uprising occurred, it estimated that 191 people died at Kwangju. Unofficial estimates range from 1,000 to 2,000 (Fallows, 1987). The uprising gave Chun an opportunity to blame Kim and the press. Kim was tried for treason and sentenced to death on dubious charges of fomenting the uprising. Under U.S. pressure, his death penalty was commuted to exile in the United States.[5]

Kim was exiled, but the press had to bear the government's fury. In July, the Ministry of Culture and Public Information revoked the registrations of 172 publications, 12 percent of the ROK's periodicals, for "obscenity" and "creating social confusion" (Harvey, 1984, pp. 2-3). Each province was limited to only one newspaper, requiring four newspapers to close (Reditt, 1981). Two independent broadcast stations, the profitable Tongyang Broadcasting Company, owned by the Samsung conglomerate, and Dong-A, a sister company of the prestigious daily newspaper, were merged into the state-controlled Korea Broadcasting Service (KBS). The Christian Broadcasting Service, established by religious groups in 1945, was not

affected by the crackdown but was warned to confine its broadcasts to religious matters (Ungar, 1987). The Korean Newspaper Association was abolished for "having been a factor in creating moral unrest" (Nam, 1980, p. 266). Chun demanded that 700 journalists from 40 newspapers and broadcast stations be purged. The government placed the burden of "press purification" on the press itself. The government provided five guidelines for determining which journalists should be purged, including those: (1) who were not sufficiently anti-communist, (2) who protested against censorship of the Kwangju uprising, (3) who were closely associated with anti-state politicians, (4) who were corrupt, and (5) who faced accusations of corruption (Pearce, 1980, p. 12).

The press purge was part of a larger crackdown on 8,667 government officials. President Choi seemed increasingly unable to govern after the Kwangju uprising, the subsequent demonstrations after the uprising, and the government's crackdown on government agencies and the press. On August 16 Choi stepped down and within two weeks Chun was elected through the electoral college. Now that he was president, Chun sought to legalize press control. On December 31, media regulation was codified into law through the Basic Press Act. Article 3 of the Act enumerated individual and social rights that in effect mandated press responsibility:

> 1. The press shall respect dignity and value of human beings and the basic democratic order;
> 2. The press shall perform its public duties by contributing to the formation of democratic public opinions concerning matters of public interest by means of news reports, commentary and other methods;
> 3. The press shall not infringe upon the personal honor or rights of an individual or public morality or social ethics;
> 4. The press shall not encourage or praise violence and other illegal action which disrupt public order (Kyu Ho Youm, 1986b, p. 675).

The Act required media organizations to be registered (licensed) by the Ministry of Culture and Information (MOCI), which may suspend or cancel registration for up to a year for violation of the Act. As Kyu (1986b, p.

678) wrote of this provision: ". . . the Act effectively grants one single governmental office, the MOCI, the power to emasculate or render mute any publication that MOCI deems to have spoken out against the government." Registrations were issued to organizations demonstrating financial solvency. It was widely believed that "objectionable" material was vaguely defined so publishers, with the financial Sword of Damocles over their heads, would err on the side of conservatism when in doubt about what to publish (Anon., 1985).

THE NEW LIBERALIZATION

The press purge of 1980 succeeded in intimidating the press into submission. For the ROK's press, the years 1980-1985 were a replay of 1975-1979, when Nam claimed that Park succeeded in "taming" the ROK's press. In 1985, with Kim Dae Jung's triumphant return to the ROK through the help of American liberals and student and trade union uprisings, there was a belief that the government had to liberalize. After the fall of President Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines to the much vaunted "people power" rebellion, the eyes of Washington and Tokyo shifted toward Seoul. Seoul responded with promises of liberalization. Over 100 unofficial and unlicensed publications openly appeared in bookstores and on newsstands. For the most part, the police took no action to restrict these publications. Stories dealing with opposition demands appeared with regularity in the press. A new National Assembly was elected on February 12, 1985. The two leading opposition parties -- nominally led by Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam -- together received 49% of the vote, compared to 35% for the ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJP). Under the contrived electoral system, however, the DJP maintained a working majority. The

Assembly convened in mid-May and called for the abolition of the Basic Press Act, a full restoration of press freedom and the reinstatement of journalists purged by Chun during 1980 (Anon., 1985).

Despite the manifest liberalization, the Basic Press Act was still in effect. An incident that occurred during 1986 made clear that press control was still very real. The underground journal Mal (Words) published a special issue in September. Mal reported press guidelines issued by the Ministry of Culture and Information from October 19, 1985, to August 8, 1986, instructing the press on how to report controversial political matters. The guidelines were surprisingly specific, citing incidents which could and could not be reported. It also instructed the press on how to report such matters as labelling demonstrators as "pro-communist," dealing with torture cases, and how to handle the reporting of U.S. criticisms of the Chun government (Anon., 1987b, 1987c). The guidelines revealed in Mal pointed to a degree of press control that is rare in the non-communist world. As the Index on Censorship (Anon., 1987b) reported: "In short, the press is not suppressed but is associated with authorities and incorporated into the instruments of repression. . ." (p. 30). The issues of Mal were seized by the government, but many had already been distributed and many more were photocopied and passed on.[6]

The publication of the guidelines brought pressure on the government for greater liberalization. Chun promised that he would break from Korean tradition and peacefully transfer power. If he kept his word, as he did, it would be the first peaceful transfer of power in the ROK's history. More importantly, Chun promised to abolish the electoral college and hold direct presidential elections. On April 13, 1987, it appeared that Chun would not keep his promise. He abruptly announced that all negotiations would be suspended until after the 1988 summer Olympic Games. Chun

selected Roh Tae Woo, a general close to Chun who played a significant but unclear role in quelling the Kwangju uprising, as the DJP candidate. With the contrived electoral system, Roh was almost sure to be elected by the electoral college. The suspension of democratic reform until after the summer Olympic Games meant that the new leader selected by the college in 1988 would have a mandate to rule until 1995.

Protests erupted throughout the ROK. At first only university students participated. But soon the nation's middle class -- the backbone of the "economic miracle" -- joined the protests. To Chun's embarrassment, scenes of workers and even businessmen, some still in their suits and ties, demonstrating against the government were broadcast throughout the world. Police in riot-gear responded to the demonstrations with teargas. Chun hinted that he might call out the military to quell the demonstrations and declare martial law. But Chun's bluff was called.

In June, Roh unexpectedly announced that he was yielding to many of the opposition's demands. He called for direct elections in which he would run as the DJP's candidate. He also called for increased press freedom, but he stopped short of calling for the abolition of the Basic Press Act.[7] Two days later Chun appeared on national television and said he agreed with Roh on all points (Anon., 1987a). It was an amazing turnabout in nation where yielding is associated with loss of face (honor). Two weeks earlier Chun talked tough: "Under no circumstances must we tolerate illegal activities, violence and demagogy. Such acts will be resolutely dealt with." Now Chun was conciliatory: "I believe that everyone -- the students who have participated in demonstrations, the policemen who have helped quell them, the citizens who have been tormented by teargas -- has the same desire to defend and promote democracy" (Walkon, 1987, p. 20).

THE FUTURE

Roh won the December 16, 1987, election with a plurality of the popular vote after the opposition, led by both Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam, split the popular vote. There were some accusations of vote fraud. But these were usually isolated incidents and not likely to have changed the election outcome. Even critics of the ruling party and U.S. liberals reluctantly conceded that there was a minimum of vote fraud. Apparently there was no need for the government to engage in vote fraud anyway after the opposition could not agree on a single candidate. Their inability to field a single opposition candidate virtually assured Roh's victory. The irony was obvious: Koreans demonstrated for the right to elect a president and wound up with the same ruler they would have had they not received the right to elect their president. A conservative military elite suspicious of democracy remains firmly entrenched and wields considerable power. It is possible that the ROK may go the route of El Salvador and the Philippines, where democratically elected moderates replaced right-wing dictators, only to find that they could not control their militaries.

As the brief history of the ROK outlined in this paper shows, the ROK has enjoyed brief stints of freedom before. In each case, these brief periods of freedom were followed by military-led coups and harsh, totalitarian rule. Nam (1978a, 1978b, 1980) has argued that the government can crack down on the press and suppress democratic aspirations at any time. It is armed with all-encompassing laws that can be used to legally implement such a crackdown. Despite what appear to be historic precedents after Rhee and Park's downfalls, there are also important differences that should be noted:

-- In this case there was a peaceful transfer of power.

-- In this case the new president was elected through a popular election.

-- In this case there exists considerably less international political tensions than in the past. The United States has moved toward rapprochement with the leading communist nations and the anti-communist fervor that led the United States to tolerate -- if not support -- anti-communist military regimes in the ROK during the 1950s and 1960s is no longer present. Despite President Reagan's anti-communist rhetoric, there is a new belief in Washington that America's allies must subscribe to democratic ideals.

-- The ROK's "economic miracle" has made continued authoritarian rule seem anachronistic. The ROK now has to consider its international image as a world economic leader.

-- The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China accept a de facto two-Korea policy. The People's Republic, in particular, has made moves to deal with the ROK. Both the Soviet Union and China have announced that they will participate in the Seoul Olympic Games this September.

-- The ROK's leaders understand that if they do not accept democracy they may have to deal with popular uprisings.

The 6th Republic of President Roh has cautiously sought to distance itself from the unpopular Chun regime. During his brief term in office so far, the press has been surprisingly free to discuss such touchy issues as the Kwangju uprising and Chun's "December 12" 1979 coup that made him the effective leader of the nation among the generals (Kyu Ho Youm, 1988). Still, there is a question just how far Roh is willing to go in permitting

criticism of the Chun regime. Roh is closely associated with the activities of Chun and is reported to have referred to Chun as "father."

Only one serious political incident has occurred during Roh's administration which sheds light on how far Roh may go in instituting democracy in the ROK. During late March the younger brother of former President Chun, Chun Kyung Hwan, was arrested in Seoul on charges of corruption and embezzlement for his activities as head of the nation's semi-rural development agency, the Saemaul Undong (New Community Movement). The Saemaul movement was founded in 1971 under the late President Park to stimulate the nation's rural development. The younger Chun was arrested before he could fly to Tokyo. The television coverage of the once-powerful Chun in handcuffs has caused a sensation in the ROK (Sneider, 1988). The press, however, has been unrestrained in its coverage of Chun's arrest. The country has grown used to reading and hearing daily accounts of Chun's alleged crimes, which include embezzling $10.4 million, tax evasion, influence-peddling, bribery, and violation of other laws.

But this incident also shows that Roh can be expected to be closely scrutinized for his commitment to democracy. The opposition parties have accused Roh of using the Chun arrest as a showcase of his intent to institute democratic reform while at the same time diverting attention away from corruption in the Chun regime at much higher levels. They charge the investigation has been limited to one man. They further charge that corruption extends to former President Chun himself and his wife, Lee Soon Ja.

As Roh moves further into his administration and as incidents arise where Roh will be forced to decide whether to expose ugly incidents of the ROK's past, including incidents with which he is personally associated, we

will learn more about whether Roh will take a democratic or authoritarian path. It is also important to keep a close eye on the ROK's military, U.S. policy, press freedom, and the Korean public. The interaction of a number of forces will play a role in determining the ROK's future.

Footnotes

1. For thorough discussions on authoritarian methods of press control see Merrill (1983, pp. 30-35) and Curry and Dassin (1982).

2. Riley and Schramm's (1951) account of the North Korean occupation of the South entitled The reds take a city: The communist occupation of Seoul illustrates the fear of communism.

3. For discussions dealing with journalistic professionalism and objectivity in the United States see Schiller (1979) and Schudson (1976). For discussions dealing with professionalism and objectivity in the Third World see Head (1963) and Kang (1987). Kang, in particular, examines professionalism among the ROK's journalists.

4. For discussions on developmental journalism see Hachten (1987, pp. 30-34) and Altschull (1984).

5. See McBeth (1987b) for a thorough account of the Kwangju uprising.

6. For a complete transcript of the guidelines see Anon. (1986).

7. See McBeth (1987c) for a summary of Roh's 8-point speech.

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